



No. 62.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 1845.



ONE of the great objects of the "Metropolitan Improvement Society," when it was established in January, 1842, was to point out the evils which have arisen from considering the improvement of different parts of London only in detail, with a view exclusively to the wants of a local district,—and to urge upon the legislature the importance of looking forward ten or fifteen years, and of employing fit and qualified persons to prepare a plan, founded upon an accurate survey, of all the improvements required in the metropolis which might be carried into effect within the period named. It was believed justly, that this would tend to the realization of various plans, which, however excellent in themselves, had failed because brought forward as private questions, and not as part of a general measure which could alone receive public support, and would prevent the adoption of inferior or inefficient schemes, which private views and influence might otherwise thrust upon the public.

When a deputation from the society waited on Sir Robert Peel, he said that his own opinions coincided with the views of the deputation; that he considered it desirable that an efficient board should be appointed to institute proper inquiries, and take a broad and comprehensive view of the whole subject; and promised that a general plan of the metropolis, on a large scale, should at once be prepared from actual survey as an indispensable first step.

The Metropolitan Improvement Commission was issued soon afterwards, but though three years have nearly passed away, the survey is not commenced, and the commissioners have effected nothing.

We are induced to recal these circumstances to the memory of our readers, and to urge on the premier the performance of his promise, by recent proceedings in Westminster. The necessity for alterations there has long been felt, and numerous plans have from time to time been proposed; but each and all have been set aside, and the much needed improvement, including the drainage, the ventilation, the health, and the morals, of the district, prevented by private interests and the squabbles of rival claimants for public approval. How much longer this is to be carried on is uncertain, but it seems clear that the question is now as open as ever, and that unless the public or the Government come forward to obtain a settlement of it, will either remain so, or be closed in such a manner as to effect much less good than ought to be the case. Parts of Westminster are at this time the very sinks of iniquity, hot-beds of crime, and the birth-place of disease; whence vice and death are brought to all the quarters of the metropolis;—none of it is well-drained, little of it well-ventilated, and it is of course to ameliorations in these respects, and to obtain good leading thoroughfares for the advantage of the whole community, that public money should be applied. It is not to be wondered

at that individuals who may know that their property will be more benefited if the new street be formed in this way than in that, should exert themselves so to regulate its arrangement, and every consideration should of course be shown to private rights and interests, but certainly these ought never to be allowed to outweigh the general good, and prevent important public improvements.

Mr. Wason's plan, as it is called, which has been introduced in the House of Commons with the sanction of Government, was opposed, our readers will remember, by some of the inhabitants of Westminster, and a public meeting was held, whereat a committee was appointed to obtain and examine other plans, and to draw the attention of the legislature to that which they considered the best. Wednesday last was the day named by advertisement for receiving plans from any parties who might be disposed to submit them, and several are now before the committee; it remains to be seen what other steps will be taken. The majority of those who oppose the present plan do so, it cannot be denied, on personal and interested grounds; Mr. Hindley, M.P., and others, assist them because they think that many of the existing inconveniences will not be removed, and that drainage, ventilation, cleanliness, and health may be better advanced by some other plan. If so, and we will not now go into this part of the question, it is of course desirable that the plan should be altered; but we beg these latter gentlemen not to be made the means of opposing all plans, and so of still further driving off the long-required improvements. The matter should be looked at in a broad and comprehensive manner, individual interests weighed, but the public good chiefly considered. If no plan is to be carried out that does not meet the views of all the inhabitants, as was urged at the meeting, Westminster will long remain in its present dreadful state—a disgrace to the metropolis.

The chief defect of the intended line, as it seems to us, is the bend made to avoid the workhouse of St. Margaret's. The consequence of this will be, partially to build out of sight the western front of the Abbey, of which, otherwise, an uninterrupted view would be obtained from a considerable distance.

At the last meeting of the Metropolitan Improvement Society, it was resolved to make a second application to the commissioners to induce them, if possible, to embrace the present opportunity for effecting a complete isolation of the Abbey. Plans were produced shewing that, by a slight deviation from the intended line, the road-way might be brought on the south side of the Abbey, leaving the cloisters untouched, and terminating with the Victoria Tower of the new Houses of Parliament. The south front of the Abbey is now wholly lost to the public, and yet it is from the south that all buildings should be viewed, from the superior play of light and shade produced by the direct rays of the sun. If the Abbey were thrown open on the south side, the effect to the public from its novelty would be almost equivalent to a new architectural creation in the metropolis. The cloisters would appear as an appropriate and picturesque foreground to the elevation; but a new façade would be required to the existing cloister bounding wall. The buildings to be removed to effect this object (belonging to the Dean and Chapter) are of an inferior class, and

more eligible sites could be found for them on ground at present unoccupied, but which in the case supposed, would enjoy a valuable frontage.

In a neighbouring district, Chelsea, considerable improvements are contemplated, and the necessary steps have been taken to enable the parish to get an Act of Parliament during the present session. It is proposed to open a variety of new roads, and to widen old ones; including two new communications between the King's-road and the Fulham-road (one in the line of Battersea-bridge, to lead direct to Kensington, and the other opposite the World's End public-house), and straightening the King's-road between Park-place, where it now turns awkwardly to the south, and Stanley-bridge. To effect these improvements, they ask power to raise 30,000*l.* by a local rate. The greater part of Chelsea has been ruined by being injudiciously laid out; and the fact that the inhabitants now feel it necessary to tax themselves to amend their past errors, should serve as a warning to other districts not yet covered.

In connection with this movement the parishioners have forwarded, or are about to forward, two memorials; one to her Majesty the Queen, and the other to the Commissioners for Metropolitan Improvements. The first sets forth that with a population of 40,000, in consequence of the rapid increase of buildings, they have no open space for recreation, and prays that the grounds in front and rear of the Royal Hospital may be planted and thrown open to the public. "In soliciting this boon," say the memorialists, "they are not aware that they are asking any thing inconsistent with the interests of the institution. Viewing it as a national asylum for the invalid veterans in the royal service, it seems more consistent with those interests that the whole of the grounds (with such exceptions as might be necessary to secure the privacy of the officers) should be thrown open to the inmates for healthful recreation, and that the public should be admitted to participate in their enjoyment, and to witness how they are cared for, than that the inmates and public should be restricted to the limited portions of the grounds now accessible to them." The second memorial is to urge the Commissioners to use their exertions so that the embankment of the Thames may be carried out without delay, and will be found at length in another part of the journal.

Among other suggested improvements in London is an arcade, to be called the Gresham Avenue, commencing in Lothbury, at the end of Bartholomew-lane, opposite the northern entrance of the Royal Exchange, and terminating at the corner of Moorgate-street, with a branch to Finsbury-circus. We have seen a prospectus, too, for the formation of an under-ground avenue through London and Westminster, to connect the various railways, but are not in a position to do more than allude to them. A very circumstantial statement appeared in the daily papers a short time since, to the effect that a new line of street, extending in continuation of St. James's-street and Albemarle-street, direct from St. James's Palace to the Regent's Park, was to be proceeded with without delay, at the express desire of her Majesty. Although this has been since pronounced a hoax, we should not be very much surprised to find some truth in it, for we happen to know that surveyors have been employed in that direction for some time past.